



From May 23rd-June 8th 2022 (Volume 127—Sicily Part two)





May/June '22

I have taken so many Sicily shots that I needed two volumes to show them (and even then it was a hard decision as to which ones I should omit)





We made good use of the Trenitalia website with timetables



Explore Sicily by train and take in the stunning views of each city from the comfort of your seat. **Palermo, Messina and Catania** are the main station hubs – you can easily reach the rest of the region from there. From Palermo Centrale, take a fast-regional train, and you'll be in Cefalù – one of the most beautiful coastal villages of all Italy, in only 40 minutes. And if you want to enjoy a town that combines amazing natural scenery with a rich artistic, historical and cultural heritage, head down to Catania Centrale and take an Intercity train to Taormina. You'll arrive at your destination in only 39 minutes! Need more inspiration to plan your train travel to Sicily? Check out our map and discover where else trains in Sicily can take you, or if you want to view the most popular routes in Italy, head to our Italy train map page.



Palermo, the capital of Sicily is buzzy and old churches, palaces in decay and modern shops with street food and cafes all of which were a never-ending source of discovery





In the central Marina Square of Palermo there's a tree believed to be one of the largest in Europe. The scientific name for this giant tree is the **Ficus Macrophylla**, but locals call it The Strangler Tree.

Still to this day, it continues to widen and grow by crushing everything obstructing its path as it is spreading its roots farther from the base.

The impressive ability of this tree and the way that it grows is partly due to its nature but also believed to be attributed to the morbid history of the Palace where the tree now stands out from.

The Palace Chiarmonte Steri was built in the 14th century and stood as the seat of the court against prisoners of the **Holy Inquisition**. Prisoners were regularly executed in the center of the square.

This was a public display of brutality provided by inquisitors to establish the dominance of the Holy Inquisition, discourage dissent and disbelief, and strike fear into those condemned.

For the purposes of the holy inquisition, it was essential for as many to attend these executions as was possible. For this reason, most of these events took place on Sundays or recognize the holidays to ensure the availability of spectators.

Executions were said to have happened precisely where the Strangler Tree now stands.

It is believed that the tree has become so abundant and aggressive on the land where is planted due to enriched soil from the blood of those sentenced to death.

Eerily enough, the roots are said to appear like long human arms because the legend suggests the dead men made its bark and leaves.





Photo History







Palazzo Riso is the museum of modern art housed in an elegant 18th century building in Via Vittorio Emanuele almost opposite our small central hotel. Mondays, once a month is free entry so we were lucky

Wardrobes suspended from the ceiling of a very large bare room was eye-catching if nothing else





Around Palermo. The great arancini street food favourite



VIA VITTORIO EMANUELE

The street is a pedestrian area between the Cathedral and Quattro Canti and this white monster is an 'installation...wow!





Photo History



I just love the smiles
on this shot...



For Palermo, read
....
STREET FOOD

Traditional Sicilian pizza is often thick crusted and rectangular, but can also be round and similar to the Neapolitan pizza. It is often topped with onions, anchovies, tomatoes, herbs and strong cheese



A fun Street café where their platters of local cheeses (and chacuterie) were totally fantastic





The many sides of Palermo



Stylish shops below and ruined buildings above



Only a local kiosk but totally 'over the top'



Graduation and all joined in the street celebration with music and drink





Photo History



BRANCO Velasco Vitali

Curated by Alessandro de Lisi
from a suggestion by fr. Sergio Catalano OP

may 23rd - july 19th 2022



“ We must not be afraid of finding and using new symbols, new forms of art, new languages, even those that seem uninteresting to evangelizers or curators, but which are actually important for people, because they know how to speak to them ”

Pope Francis

“ At the foot of Saint Dominic there is a dog that symbolises his mission. The fold of the Church, at certain times, needs shepherd dogs. In these hours, the Lord has always raised them up,, ”

Madeleine Delbr l

SALVIFIC IRRUPTIONS

Il Branco by Velasco Vitali in St Dominic's Church

fr. Sergio Catalano OP

Salvific irruptions is the specific form that the installation *Il Branco* by Velasco Vitali assumes when entering St Dominic's Church in Palermo on the occasion of the *Day of Remembrance* on May 23rd 2022, the thirtieth anniversary of the mafia massacres in Capaci and via D'Amelio.

Precisely one year ago, *Il Branco* appeared for the first time in Palermo in the bunker room of the Ucciardone prison: 53 life-size dogs, just as 53 were Giovanni Falcone's years when he passed away; sculptures in iron, sheet metal and concrete, placed behind bars in order to symbolise the hunger of criminal organisations and the abuse of society by the mafia. At the same time, they were placed on the benches of judges or lawyers deputed to guarantee the law. Together with them, but on the sidelines, a golden dog watched in the *vault* where the investigation of the first historic *maxi-trial* against *Cosa Nostra* is kept.

I physically met *Il Branco* in the monumental courtyard of the Faculty of Law in Palermo, where many young people study and mature the ways of justice. The work of art had already been installed at the command of the Police Headquarters - the point from which all the investigations to dismantle organised crime began - and at the *Palazzo dei Normanni*, the seat of civil and institutional power. All of these are urban passages of a travelling exhibition in symbolic places of our society. A long paradigmatic journey.

D'embl e I felt immersed in the history of my last twenty years. The work had pulled me into my hagiographic and iconographic world: the *Ordo praedicatorum*. From there came the intuition: what if *Il Branco* broke into San Domenico, temporarily giving new light to the church, to the community of friars and to the world of the faithful and tourists who frequent it? After all, from an iconographic point of view, wasn't Saint Dominic depicted from the beginning as a dog running for the salvation of the world?

Domini-canes. The mission of the Order of Preachers in the Church and in the world

"Before his mother Jane had conceived him, it appeared to her in a vision that she was carrying a little dog in her womb holding a burning torch in its mouth, which, once released from her womb, seemed to set the whole world on fire". This is what blessed Jordan of Saxony, first successor and biographer of St. Dominic, reported in his *Libellus*.

"In the vision of the dog, the birth of an eminent preacher was prefigured, one who would carry the torch of an ardent speech, by which charity, now cooled in many hearts, might be inflamed with force, and with the barks of assiduous preaching he would have chased the wolves from the flock and prompted to the vigilance of the virtues the souls who slept in sins", as explained Blessed Humbert of Romans. Hence the "logo" of the *Ordo praedicatorum*. From that moment on, the image of the faithful dog will embody the figure of Saint Dominic of Guzm n. Over time, the image will be strengthened by the play on words in Latin of the name that the friars following his steps, the Dominicans, will assume: *Domini canes*, the dogs of the Lord.

In the history of the Order, among the many readings of the symbol, especially significant is the one by Madeleine Delbr l. In one of her letters to the Dominican friar Jacques Loew, the French mystic wrote:

When a flock is small and the sheep are docile, and there are few or no wolves at all, the shepherd can do without the dog. When the flock is large and the sheep are wandering, not just alone but in packs, and the wolves are numerous, the shepherd must have a dog and maybe more than one. Dogs always look like wolves, and often the best shepherd dogs are wolf dogs. It is what they have kept of the wolf that allows them to do for the shepherd what he himself would not do. But it is what the shepherd has communicated to them about himself that makes them shepherd dogs. It is by sharing the shepherd's life a little

that the dog remains a dog and does not become a wolf. At the foot of Saint Dominic there is a dog that symbolizes his mission. The fold of the Church, at certain times, needs shepherd dogs. In these hours, the Lord has always raised them up.

Reading these notes, in my view, enriched the opportunity to have Velasco Vitali's work in St Dominic's with a new light. Isn't this also the task of art, especially when it enters churches: to bring to memory, through evocative images, the strength of the *salvific content*, keeping consciences awake and freeing them from the risk of amnesia? Does not perhaps *Il Branco* by Velasco Vitali collaborate in re-presenting the charisma of St. Dominic and his friars in a contemporary way and at the same time providentially disturbing the constituted quiet of the space by snatching firstly the friar and the faithful, then the tourist, from the danger of habit and of the *already seen* or *already known*? Isn't this the mission of the Order in the Church and in the world: to announce the resurrection where death seems to be the only master?

Art in churches

To deal with a work of art in a monumental church space is certainly an exciting undertaking.

Art, in order to communicate messages, must continually refer to the symbolic universe of human beings and their contemporary forms of expression. As Pope Francis reminds us: "We must not be afraid of finding and using new symbols, new forms of art, new languages, even those that seem uninteresting to evangelizers or curators, but which are actually important for people, because they know how to speak to them". This is an invitation to the Church to allow and facilitate dialogue between contemporary forms of expression, intended as places where the Christian message can come to life and be incarnated.

One of the interesting aspects of *Il Branco* installation is the spirit with which the artist materially conceived the work. The reuse and waste material chosen by Velasco Vitali is thought of as an added value. In 2015, even Pope Francis affirmed this in the interview published in *My idea of art*. On that occasion, several times, the Pope repeated that "the creativity of which we are capable does not discard anything, it considers everything, in particular the poor raw material, often set aside and thrown away ... God's mercy, in fact, does not reject anything; the signs that he performs towards poor, excluded and suffering people are marked by mercy". The Pope concludes: "If God does not discard his children, not even an inspired art is called not to discard anything".

Conclusion. In the history of humanity

Initiatives such as welcoming *Il Branco* to St Dominic's are not meant to distract with artistic gimmicks or to hide the truth but to raise questions and challenge the demands of the Gospel and the world in contemporary ways.

Il Branco comes to the church not to exalt the power of death but to highlight the power of life through the continuous activation of memory and the power of conversions. Is this not perhaps the object of the mystery of faith?

Giovanni Falcone's body has been resting in St Dominic's in Palermo, Pantheon of the illustrious of Sicily, since 2015. He is with us as an illustrious man *in memory of all* the illustrious people engaged in the service of the community in the fight against the mafia. He is a symbol of the possibility of good and justice.

The *Day of legality* commemorates this by relaunching over time - now for thirty years - the strength of its memory. My work as a friar preacher with *Il Branco* by Velasco Vitali in St Dominic's Church is part of this story of responsibility, thanks to art. A work where the *triumphs of death* are turned upside down thanks to *salvific irruptions* that announce, in their own way, the human and social resurrection.





The church was full of dogs..everywhere, even draped over the pulpit. One had to admire the audacity of this artistic venture in such a religious Catholic environment



Photo History

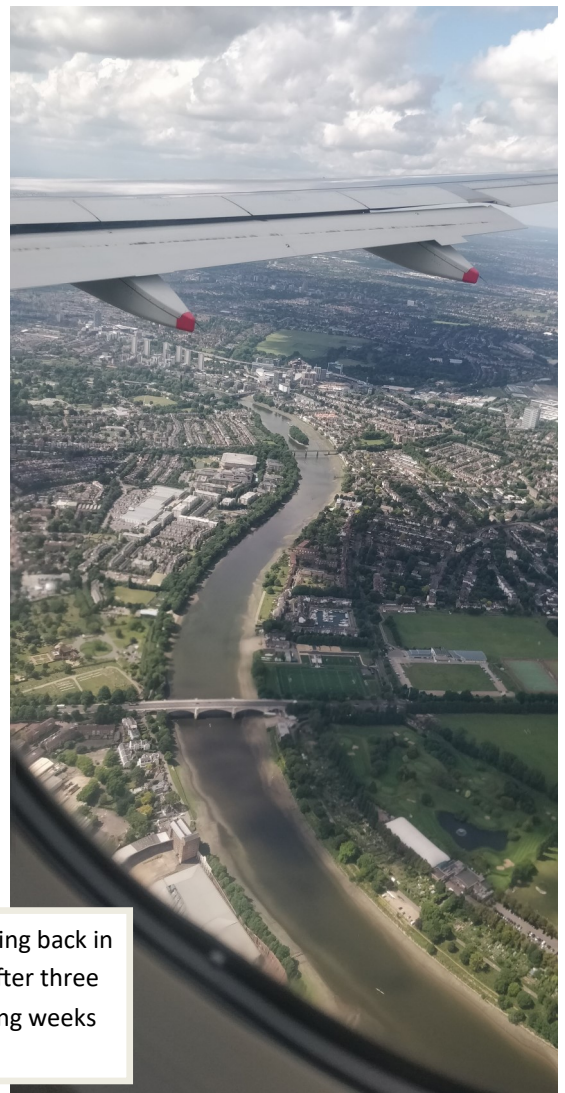




The Post Office in Palermo was striking...The Palazzo delle Poste on Via Roma, designed by Angiolo Mazzoni, was built between 1930 and 1934. It is an interesting fusion of Classicist and Rationalist architecture.



Our final trip from Palermo to the airport



..and arriving back in the UK after three fascinating weeks



Photo History





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